



Christian Ethics and Nonhuman Animals



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Animals: Tradition - Philosophy - Religion

Christian Ethics and Nonhuman Animals

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God is love (1 John 4:8, 4:16)

ABSTRACT: In a world humming with animal rights and animal liberation, it is important to assess Christian teachings with regard to human-nonhuman responsibilities and interactions. This article explores the lives of saints, humanism and idolatry, God's rights, and the life and teachings of Jesus, including central concepts such as service, compassion, mercy, and love, that we might better understand Christian spiritual duties with regard to creation, and more specifically, with regard to other animals. This article is not critical in nature, but reveals how much we might learn from the spiritual and moral teachings of the Christian tradition about our place in the larger universe.

Christians, like Jews, hold the Tanakh as sacred, though they call this group of texts the Old Testament. Christians, like Jews, worship a God who created a non-violent, vegan world; in the peaceable kingdom "no creature was to feed on another" (Hyland, Slaughter 21). Christians, like Jews, have been given a rulership in which they are to lovingly tend and serve, and in which people are created in the "image of God," with "the capacity to reflect God's love and compassion" (Kaufman 26).

For Christians, as for Jews, animals are not created for people, but live for themselves and for God (Sorabji 199). “God makes the animals before man, and pronounces them good without man (Gen. 1.24-25): they are made by God and for God” (Griffiths 8). “The God of Israel delights in all that He has made. All creatures sing their Creator’s praises, and are dear to Him for their own sakes” (Scully 92). For Jews and Christians, who hold the same creation story sacred, who both honor the Tanakh/Old Testament to be sacred, the value of animals lies with God, “who made all things good and precious in his sight” (Linzey After 13). What does the Christian tradition, the New Testament, add to this rich inheritance of sacred teachings with regard to human-nonhuman interactions?

Old Testament writings regarding animals are particularly important because the primary Christian text, the New Testament, focuses on the life of Christ and offers less explicit information about how humans ought to interact with animals.

There is relatively little about animals in the New Testament. They are referred to incidentally in descriptions of everyday life and appear in parables and figures of speech, but they are never the express topic of any passage. . . . The Old Testament point of view on animals was taken as valid in Judaism at the time of Jesus, and in the New Testament is considered as self-evident. (Vischer 15)

The New Testament assumes knowledge of the Old Testament, and does not repeat much of what is taken for granted in the Judeo-Christian tradition based on the Old Testament. The Old Testament, combined with the New Testament, provides Christianity with all that is needed to protect animals: Christianity has “created a state of mind out of which the modern movement for the legal prohibition of cruelty to animals grew up” (Hume 3).

Saints, a Benevolent Creator, and Sentients

In both early and medieval Christianity, Christian morals demanded compassion toward animals (Hughes 313). Saints of all ages have modeled kindness, and are famous for their love of all creatures. For those closest to God, the nature of animals, and their complete subjugation to the ever-growing

power of human beings, requires Christian charity and Christ-like protective tenderness (Polk 185). Christian saints remind the faithful that to be in relationship with God is to have amicable relations with animals.

Hagiographies, stories recording the lives of saints, demonstrate that holy people in the Christian tradition, people known for their proximity to God and for living up to the Christian ideal, were compassionate and tender toward animals. These documents testify to a host of “courageous Christians: saints and seers, theologians and poets, mystics and writers who have championed the cause of animals. The list must include almost two-thirds of those canonized saints East and West, not only St. Francis but also St. Martin, Richard of Chichester, Chrysostom, Isaac the Syrian, Bonaventure, and countless others” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 27). Christianity has a long tradition of “saints returning to paradisaal relations with the animals, communing with them and curing them” (Sorabji 203). Many saints found little to separate humans from the rest of nature (Polk 185).

St. Francis of Assisi “valued every species and was drawn into wonder and prayer by individual creatures” (Hughes 315, 316). He taught Christian humility and the equality of all creatures (White 1206-07). As part of his missionary work, Francis “asked for captive animals, and cared for or released them. If wild animals were given to him, he treated them gently and let them go. Often they sensed his friendship so strongly that they stayed near him instead of fleeing” (Hughes 317). St. Francis insisted that his followers exemplify compassion toward all living beings, and it was his deepest hope that kindness might flow from people toward the great expanse of the created world.

Saints demonstrate “a reversal of the relationship of fear and enmity between humans and animals that appertains after the Fall and the Flood” (Linzey, *After* 100). St. Jerome, St. Guthlac of Croyland, and St. Godric lived with wild animals. St. Kieran of Saighir “lived with a wild boar, a fox, a badger, a wolf and a deer” (Vischer 26). Hagiographies even credit animals with a spiritual understanding that humans lack, as in the story of St. Columba’s white horse (Waddell). Sometimes animals assisted saints, such as the wild ass that helped Abbot

Helenus. At other times, saints assisted animals, as when St. Godric harbored a stag from the terror and cruelty of hunters.

Christianity, “for roughly fifteen centuries... held the natural world in some form of close relationship with humanity and God in their doctrinal and moral reflection” (Johnson 17). Pope John Paul II noted that St. Francis “looked upon creation with the eyes of one who could recognize in it the marvelous work of the hand of God” (Scully 24). St. John of the Cross noted that animals “are all clothed with marvelous natural beauty,” reflecting the image of God (Linzey, After 79). The influential monk, Thomas a Kempis, commented, “If your heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and mean that it does not put forth the goodness of God” (69). Animals share “the breath of life, each in their own way bearing His unmistakable mark” (Scully 2). The German theologian Meister Eckhart wrote:

Apprehend God in all things,
for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of god
and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God.

If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—
even a caterpillar—
I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of
God
is every creature.

Catherine of Siena wrote that those devoted to God love all of God’s creatures “so deeply” because “they realize how deeply Christ loves them,” and to love what is loved by God because it is loved by God, is the essence of a Christian heart (Linzey, After 74).

We are part of a universe that faithfully reflects the design of a loving and generous creator—a world that can exist, and can only continue to exist, through God’s attentive care. “God cares also for the other 99 percent of creation, not just for the 1 percent (actually, less than 1 percent) that humans constitute” (McFague 35). Christians “must never destroy

without serious justification and without acknowledging that all life belongs not to us but to God” (Linzey, After 105). Animals “are God’s creatures: ...we have an obligation to the Creator to respect what is created” (Linzey, Animal Gospel 49). If people understand themselves to be “created by God, who knows us and loves us and has a plan for us, so we will tend to see [animals]—entirely dependent beings just like us, made to some purpose beyond our full knowing, formed of the same dust and fated for the same death” (Scully 306-7). Christians are to act on this knowledge, and the conservative Christian Matthew Scully writes:

If, in a given situation, we have it in our power either to leave the creature there in his dark pen or let him out into the sun and breeze and feed him and let him play and sleep and cavort with his fellows—for me it’s an easy call. Give him a break. Let him go. Let him enjoy his fleeting time on earth, and stop bringing his kind into the world solely to suffer and die. It doesn’t seem like much to us, the creature’s little lives of grazing and capering and raising their young and fleeing natural predators. Yet it is the life given them, not by breeder but by Creator. It is all they have. It is their part of the story, a beautiful part beyond the understanding of man, and who is anyone to treat it lightly? Nothing to us—but for them it is the world. (43)

Life is sacred in the Christian tradition, because it is of God. Christians are to see “every life, ours and the lives around us, even in trial and sorrow as the gifts they are—no creature slighted in being what it is, all exactly as they are meant to be” (Scully 304). If Christians treat the world (and all its myriad creatures) with loving care, they acknowledge each creature as God’s, as a priceless individual, and thereby express reverence for God’s works, for God’s sovereignty. “To affirm the blessedness of creation is to affirm an independent source of its worth.... [A]ll creation has an irreducible value” (Linzey, Christianity 8). If a Christian visits the abattoir or factory farm, and finds “in the darkest and tiniest stall or pen, . . . the filthiest, most forlorn little lamb or pig or calf. . . that is one of God’s creatures” (Scully 26). God has an interest in creation; each creature has intrinsic value in God’s sight, and the justice

and mercy of God extends to all of creation (Linzey, After 120).

The Anglican priest, Dr. Humphrey Primatt, seems to have offered the first theological argument for extending justice to animals. In *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, Primatt writes: “Love is the great Hinge upon which universal Nature turns. The Creation is a transcript of the divine Goodness; and every leaf in the book of Nature reads us a lecture on the wisdom and benevolence of its great Author [U]pon this principle, every creature of God is good in its kind; that is, it is such as it ought to be” (Murti). Primatt spoke not only for creeping and flying beasts, but also for human beings. He noted that differences are irrelevant in a universe created by God in which we are asked to love—each being is created exactly as God intended, whether with dark skin or light, whether gay or straight, whether cuckoo or louse.

Now, if amongst men, the differences of their powers of the mind, and of their complexion, stature, and accidents of fortune, do not give any one man a right to abuse or insult any other man on account of these differences; for the same reason, a man can have no natural right to abuse and torment a beast, merely because a beast has not the mental powers of a man.

For, such as the man is, he is but as God made him; and the very same is true of the beast. . . . And being such, neither more nor less than God made them, there is no more demerit in a beast being a beast, than there is merit in a man being a man. . . .

[T]he author and finisher of our faith, hath commanded us to be merciful, as our Father is also merciful, the obligation upon Christians becomes the stronger; and it is our bounded duty, in an especial manner, and above all other people, to extend the precept of mercy. . . . [A] cruel Christian is a monster of ingratitude, a scandal to his profession and beareth the name of Christ in vain. (Murti)

Primatt added a spiritual moral imperative: “Pain is pain, whether it is inflicted on man or on beast; and the creature that suffers it, . . . suffers Evil” (Murti). Justice understood in this light is not simply “rendering to each their due,” but is more profoundly understood as “rendering to each their dignity as a creation of God” (Martin-Schramm 440). We are not allowed to harm others—any others. “We may pretend to what religion we please,” Primatt concludes, “but cruelty is atheism. We may boast of Christianity; but cruelty is infidelity. We may trust to our orthodoxy; but cruelty is the worst of heresies” (Murti). When creation is understood to be God’s, the “abuse of animals—like the oppression of human beings—is opposed to the way of life that God has ordained” (Hyland, Slaughter 1). Scully notes, “cruelty is not only a denial of the animal’s nature but a betrayal of our own” (303).

A God-centered Faith, Salvation for All, and Divine Rights

Christian humility is central to recognizing our place in creation. Christian humility asks knowingly: “[W]hat are we to Him but what [animals] are to us?” (Scully 35). Both idolatry and humanism are inimical to Christianity. Human arrogance and human-centered ideals deny a God-centered faith, and affirm the infectious blight of humanism, a belief system where people are the measure of all:

Many of us seem to have lost all sense of restraint toward animals, an understanding of natural boundaries, a respect for them as beings with needs and wants and a place and purpose of their own. Too often, too casually, we assume that our interests always come first, and if it’s profitable or expedient that is all we need to know. We assume that all these other creatures with whom we share the earth are here for us, and only for us. We assume, in effect, that we are everything and they are nothing. (Scully xi)

If Christians “neglect the place and significance of other creatures in God’s good creation, Christian theology fundamentally weakens itself, and its claim to be . . . God centered” (Linzey, After 119). For Christians the value of creation, of each creature, “does not lie in whether it is beautiful (to us) or whether it serves or sustains our life and

happiness.... Only God, and not man, is the measure of all” (Linzey, “Liberation” 513). What is profitable for human beings is not the measure of Christian morality. Humanity is not the center of the Christian universe; this world was not created for human purposes. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, notes that the concept of God “forbids the idea of a cheap creation, of a throw-away universe in which everything is expendable save human existence” because the “universe is a work of love” (Linzey After 13). Even “that which seem[s] of little worth in human eyes [is] of value in the sight of God” (Hyland, God’s 47). The Old and New Testament “are united in their conviction that the world of living creatures exists because God loves them, and sustains them, and rejoices in them. . . . The central point is. . . the recognition of worth, of value, outside ourselves. Human beings are not the sum total of all value” (Linzey, After 12). Humanism is human-centered, Christianity is God-centered. Instead of focusing on human welfare, on what benefits human beings, Christianity requires that people see

...animals as fellow creatures on their own terms, some glorious and mighty like the elephant, some fearful and lethal like the tiger, some joyful and gentle like the dolphin, some lowly and unprepossessing like the pig, but not a one of them, however removed from our exalted world, hidden from its Maker’s sight. (Scully 26).

Christianity “reminds us that creation is not just a colorful backdrop for human actions,” and aligns us “with something good, permanent, and infinitely greater than any plan we could ever conceive or any profit we could ever gain” (Scully 304).

Everything that exists is God’s, and humans have been charged with a rulership “as a wise king rules over and protects his subjects, or as God reigns over creation, sustaining, cherishing, and safeguarding every living thing (Kowalski 24). We have been given a rulership in which we “take care of what God entrusts to us—our lives, our health, and all the world around us, including animals” (Kaufman ix). “If humans are to claim a lordship over creation, then it can only be a lordship of service” (Linzey, Animal Gospel 43). Our service is not just toward humans, or toward furry, large-eyed animals, but all creatures, for if not even a sparrow falls

without God knowing then we are not too important to notice such creatures ourselves (Scully 2).

Christians who want to understand God's will "strive to see the world through God's eyes rather than [their] own" (Kaufman 2). The Christian God cares about all aspects of creation. A good and loving God must remain morally responsible for and invested in every sentient being, for "a redeeming God could not eschew the sighing and suffering of all creatures" (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 34). Nothing that has lived and suffered can be overlooked by a just and good God. The New Testament assures us that our fellow creatures share in Christian salvation:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves... (Rom. 8:18-23)

Other books in the New Testament also announce that the whole of creation shares the curse and the promise; all of creation is united in Jesus and awaiting salvation:

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph. 1:9-10)

[F]or in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God

was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:16-20)

Each animal has eternal significance; all of creation is contained in Christ and reconciled through Christ. Christian theologians include nature in their spiritual vision, “interpreting it as God’s good creation, a revealing pathway to the knowledge of God, and a partner in human salvation” (Johnson 6).

For Christians, “the whole debate about animals is precisely about the rights of the Creator” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 44). Andrew Linzey, a contemporary theologian exploring human obligations toward creation, posits “theos-rights” (as distinct from animal rights), “emphasizing the priority of God’s right in creation” (Christianity 71). Because God is “sovereign Creator, all rights in an absolute sense are God’s” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 50). Linzey focuses attention on the “value of a God-given life” (*Animal Gospel* 45). “All creation, large and small, intelligent and unintelligent, sentient and non-sentient has worth because God values it” (Linzey, Christianity 9). Theos-rights rest on nothing less than “the will of God” (Linzey, Christianity 75).

Theos-rights demand that Christians exercise power only towards God’s ends (Linzey, Christianity 87, 96, 98). Through the covenant, “God elects creatures of flesh and blood into a relationship with himself and humanity” (Linzey, Christianity 80). What we owe God is that we “value what God has given” as highly as each creature values his or her own life (Linzey, Christianity 87). Each creature finds his or her own life worthy of protection and preservation, whether dove or dromedary. Linzey asserts that Christians are to “conceptualize what is owed to animals as a matter of justice by virtue of their Creator’s right. Animals can be wronged because their Creator can be wronged in his creation” (Linzey, *Animal Theology* 27).

The Gospels and Jesus as Moral Exemplar

The most important New Testament documents are the Gospels, which record the life and teachings of Jesus. The Gospels provide the basis for a Christian life. Most

importantly, Jesus exemplifies the Christian life of love and compassion.

The life of Jesus provides a vision of Genesis 2, of how we are to serve and lovingly tend creation. The Gospels reveal Jesus engaged in self-sacrificing service to “the least of these” (Mat. 25:40), deeply concerned for the oppressed and downtrodden. He is recorded as saying, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mk 9:35). “[W]hoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 9:35, 10: 42-5).

Jesus ministered to the lawless and healed the sickly. He exemplifies the ideal Christian life. “The power of God is redefined in Jesus as practical costly service extending to those who are beyond the normal boundaries of human concern: the diseased, the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts. He inspired “many social reformers, from slave abolitionists to animal protectionists” (Kaufman 30). In Christianity, humans are not an elite in the sense of luxuries and power, but are “the servant species: the species given power, opportunity and privilege to give themselves, nay sacrifice themselves, for the weaker, suffering creatures” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 44).

We need a conception of ourselves in the universe not as the master species but as the servant species. . . . We must move from the idea that the animals were given to us and made for us, to the idea that we were made for creation, to serve it and ensure its continuance. This actually is little more than the theology of Genesis chapter two. The garden is made beautiful and abounds with life; humans are created specifically to “take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). (Linzey, “Arrogance” 69)

Human dominion is a privilege of responsibility that requires self-sacrificing service (Hume 6-7). Jesus, the Christian moral exemplar, lived a life devoted to weak and imperfect beings. His overall message speaks of compassion and service of the strong for the weak, of the high for the lowly. “We love God by serving God’s creation. We love our neighbors by serving our neighbors, and the farther they stand below us in the

hierarchy of power—the more they stand in need of our help—the greater is our moral obligation to serve them” (Phelps, *Dominion* 150).

I suggest that the failure of the Church to champion humaneness is a fundamental failure on its own part to understand its own Gospel. For that Gospel as exemplified in Jesus Christ is about service to the sick, poor, disadvantaged, diseased, imprisoned, and all others who are regarded as the lowest of all, and not least to the whole world of suffering non-human creatures. . . . We cannot love God and be indifferent to suffering creatures. (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 94)

“If our power over animals confers upon us any rights, there is only one: the right to serve” (Linzey, *Animal* 38), and few humans are in need of our service so much as animals trapped in labs and herded to slaughter.

Jesus teaches Christian morality in word and deed. Nowhere is this more clear in the New Testament than in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), which start with the words “blessed are.” It is here that Christians find a succinct statement of Christian virtues, and a vision of who the faithful are to strive to become. The Beatitudes provide “a training manual for exercising the dominion of love” (Phelps, *Dominion* 151). Three of the beatitudes are particularly important for understanding rightful Christian relations with animals.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). “[M]eekness is the child of love and compassion. As such, it is the quality that most clearly displays the image of God in our lives” (Phelps, *Dominion* 151). Based on his demeanor, Jesus was equated with the lamb, a creature so meek as to be helpless. William Blake wrote:

Little Lamb, who made thee?

Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,
By the stream and o’er the mead; . . .

Little Lamb, I’ll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,

For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild
He became a little child. . . .

Little Lamb, God bless thee!

Little Lamb, God bless thee!

Though powerful in ways we cannot comprehend, Jesus was as meek as a lamb, never seeking “advantage through the suffering of another” (Phelps, *Dominion* 151). All creatures are safe in the company of those as meek as Jesus.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mat. 5:7). Christians “above all should hear the call to mercy. They above all should have some kindness to spare. They above all should be mindful of the little things, seeing, in the suffering of these creatures,” a life that is God’s, and that is worthy of Christian care (Scully 325). For those of faith, “sensitivity to suffering is a sign of grace and also a litmus test of our fidelity to the passionate Creator God” (Linzey, *After* 132). “Kindness to animals is a small yet necessary part of a decent and holy life, essential if only as a check against human arrogance and our tendency to worship ourselves, our own works and appetites and desires instead of our Creator and His works” (Scully 99).

While kindness may not always be profitable, “[t]here are truths greater than our own wishes” (Scully 310). In the Christian tradition there is “a higher law regarding [animal] care and we must answer to it—not just when it suits us, not just when we feel the spirit upon us, and not just when it’s cost-efficient, but always” (Scully 308). The New Testament commands: “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Lk. 6:36). Jesus was concerned for the weak and vulnerable, those exploited and overlooked. For Christians, the “more deeply someone can be damaged by our cruelty, the greater is our obligation to show mercy. And our cruelty damages no one more deeply than the defenseless animals on whom we turn our terrible power” (Phelps, *Dominion* 152). Christian mercy extends “to all the living souls who find themselves in our dominion” (Phelps, *Dominion* 154). Mercy is at the heart of our relationship with God, and at the heart of our relationship with animals. As we require mercy, so do they. “Why just say grace when you can show it?” (Scully 45). “Any theology

which desensitizes us to suffering” cannot be Christian theology, for Christianity is “centered on the divine vindication of innocent suffering” (Linzey, After 132).

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God” (Mat. 5:9). “At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the dream of universal peace, a world where humans are no longer violent and cruel to other creatures” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 81). The New Testament teaches that “wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy” and that a “harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace” (James 3:17-18). The peacemakers exemplify the Christian life because the Godly spirit “continually seeks to lead the human race out of the violence and selfishness that made a hell out of the paradise” (Hyland, *Slaughter* 3).

The Christian spiritual life promotes peace with every creature, and creates a spirit of universal benevolence (Murti). Universal peace will not come of its own accord. Christians are to, “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33), and are to remember that “love, compassion, and peace” are at the core of righteousness and God’s kingdom (Kaufman 2). For Christians, a peaceful, compassionate lifestyle, and the anticipated peace that is to follow, are the actualization of “the knowledge of the Lord” (Guthrie 598). Christians, then, are to strive for universal peace, a vision that is central to the Christian way of life and anticipated for the future. Christians “cannot be true ambassadors of Christ’s peace nor agents for the world’s reconciliation,” if they do not have peaceful intent (Kaufman 41). By working for universal peace in our daily lives, Christians “cooperate with God’s Spirit in the work of wholeness and renewal” (Linzey, After 109).

More fundamental even than the beatitudes is the New Testament commandment to love. Love is “the paramount scripture... essential to the Christian way of life” (Allen 12:214). “Cogito ergo sum: ‘I think, therefore I am’? Nonsense. Amo ergo sum: ‘I love, therefore I am’” (Coffin 11). Almost all Christians agree that love is “the paramount scripture . . . essential to the Christian way of life” (Allen 12:214).

1 John 4:8 and 1 John 4:16 state simply, “God is love.” In this passage love is “not merely an attribute of God but defines his nature, though in a practical rather than philosophic sense. . . . God’s nature is not exhausted by the quality of love, but love governs all its aspects and expressions” (Buttrick 12: 280). Christian sensitivity to suffering measures fidelity to a compassionate Creator and is understood to originate in the munificence of divine love, which connects each of us with the Almighty (Allen 12: 214).

Christian service entails generous, risky love, such service is central to the ministry of Jesus. “If we love nothing, we suffer little, if at all” (Linzey, After 102). As God was born and died for mortal, earthling creations, Christians are to engage in costly, loving condescension toward creation. Jesus as moral exemplar provides a paradigm for a way of life that ends on the cross. He revealed “the sacrificial nature of lordship,” calling Christians to a similar servitude (Linzey, Christianity 87, 96). Jesus models a life of all-embracing love culminating in death on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice. Christians are to seek redemption by entering into suffering, by serving as Christ served, by helping the powerless animals under our dominion, and thereby sharing some of what Jesus suffered on our account.

An understanding of Christian love, or of God’s love, that limits care and affection “is spiritually impoverished” (Linzey, 1997: 131).

Love is not a “zero-sum game” or some sort of hydraulic fluid whose volume is perforce static. This is the argument of “compassion fatigue” and it only holds short-term. Long-term, all religions and especially Christianity, teach that one can expand one’s capacity to love, and ought consciously to do so. (Halley, Unpublished communication)

Christianity teaches that one can expand one’s capacity to love, and ought consciously to do so” (Halley, unpublished manuscript). For practicing Christians, love is understood to be limitless. “In the story of the Good Samaritan and elsewhere, Christ expanded the idea of ‘love your neighbor’ outwards from the small circle of ‘Jews’ to a much larger circle of people including Samaritans.... St. Paul continued

the process (Gal. 3:28), extending the circle to include all gentiles.... Perhaps there is no limit” (Halley, Unpublished). Christians must not condemn animals “with a zero-sum vision of compassion that assumes a fixed and finite reserve of available love” (Scully 139). Christian spirituality entails a vision of limitless love, and a life that reflects this understanding.

And what is this Gospel? It is nothing less than the conviction and experience that God loves the whole world. What we see in Jesus is the revelation of an inclusive, all-embracing, generous loving. A loving that washes the feet of the world. A loving that heals individuals from oppression, both physical and spiritual. A loving that takes sides with the poor, vulnerable, diseased, hated, despised, and outcasts of his day. A loving that is summed up in his absolute commitment to love at all costs, even in extreme suffering and death. (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 23)

The “love of God is inclusive not only of humans but also all creatures” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 24). To “know the Word made flesh requires that we honor all flesh” (Linzey, *After* 103). Jesus was of the flesh, and Christians view Jesus as God. Jesus was God born as animal; God the primate.

Christianity is rooted in “compassionate service to others” and affirms personal responsibility to care for all that has been created (French 488). “God’s love is free, generous and unlimited,” and it is “a poor theology that wants to limit love” (*Animal Gospel* 24, 69). The New Testament informs that the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). Christians are expected to strive for these attributes of spiritual excellence. Scripture demands a life of sacrificial, Christ-like love, which originates in the munificence of God’s love and connects Christians with God (Allen 12:214).

Christians are obligated to work toward bringing about a peaceful kingdom on earth (Buttrick 7: 312), to participate in the “final triumph of God’s will” through daily life (Allen 8: 115, Kaufman 30-31). “Until all violence is overcome by love, . . . creation remains unfinished and incomplete” (Linzey,

After 76). “Jesus affirmed that doing God’s will is essential to entering heaven” (Kaufman 29). Hearing is not enough, Christians must act on the teachings of Jesus, to live lives of love and service. “Jesus did not advise his followers to wait patiently for the realm of God, but to seek it actively” (Kaufman 31).

“The Lord’s Prayer,” one of the most commonly repeated New Testament passages, reminds the devout: “Your kingdom come. / Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10). The Peaceable Kingdom of the Old Testament, the idyllic vision for the future, involves all Christians. The fulfillment of God’s plan can and will happen on this very earth through the “work of all who believe in Jesus Christ and his kingdom” (Buttrick 5: 250-51).

Jesus did not teach an otherworldly religion; he did not tell his followers to accept the injustices of this world and piously look forward to an afterlife in which goodness and justice would rule. To the contrary, he told his followers that they were to behave in such a way that life on earth would be a reflection of the goodness of the heavenly kingdom. He told them to pray that God’s “will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mat. 6:10) (Hyland, God’s 85)

Humans have been “commissioned to liberate God’s creation” (Linzey, Animal Theology 71). Jesus commanded us to help those in need—whoever “those” might be. The life of Jesus calls us to extend moral consideration—justice and compassion—to all of creation. “Solidarity with victims, . . . and action on behalf of justice” must now embrace “other species” (Johnson 15). The justice of God “extends to the smallest part of creation” (Linzey, After 127). The devout are to spread Christian “care as far and wide as possible, to be His instruments in a loving concern for all creation” (Scully 20). The function of the church is as “guardian of creation” (Daneel 535).

The life of Jesus and the Christian moral imperative to act on behalf of the downtrodden must now be “extended to nature: nature is the ‘new poor’; nature deserves justice” (McFague 30). All of creation is worthy of our attention and spiritual

energy. How we treat animals matters. “For [animals] as for us, if there is any hope at all then it is the same hope, and the same love, and the same God” who promises a return of universal peace on earth (Scully 398). The Christian life is “witness to Christ’s love, compassion, and peace,” and Christians are to “have a sense of contributing to God’s plan to reconcile all Creation” to a peaceful, vegan world (Kaufman 48).

Christian morality is demanding, all-encompassing, and rooted in compassion. In the Gospels, Jesus reminds that “only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” will enter the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 7:21). “How we treat our fellow creatures is only one more way in which each one of us, every day, writes our own epitaph—bearing into the world a message of light and life or just more darkness and death, adding to the world’s joy or to its despair” (Scully 398). Christians must ask themselves: “Do I seek to help reconcile the world to God’s original intentions? Do I, to the best of my ability, express the love, compassion, and peace of Christ?” (Kaufman 50).

When a man’s love of finery clouds his moral judgment, that is vanity. When he lets a demanding palate make his moral choices, that is gluttony. When he ascribes the divine will to his own whims, that is pride. And when he gets angry at being reminded of animal suffering that his own daily choices might help to avoid, that is moral cowardice. (Scully 121)

Faith in Jesus “can, and should, make a difference to our daily interactions with other creatures” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 13). Christ transforms “human character, and will ultimately change the whole creation” (Guthrie 598).

Christian “regard for animals requires actually giving up a few things” (Scully 107). The Christian commitment to end suffering will be complex, varied, and costly (as is Christian love and care for humans). “[T]o stand with Jesus means to stand against the abuse of animals” (Linzey, *Animal Gospel* 13). Either the suffering of other creatures “has moral value or it does not have moral value. Either there is a God or there isn’t. Either He cares about animals or He doesn’t. Either we

have duties of kindness or we do not” (Scully 310). For Christians, the question at stake is “whether to side with the powerful and the comfortable or with the weak, afflicted, and forgotten. Whether, as. . . economic actor[s] in a free market, [they] answer to the god of money or to the God of mercy” (Scully 325). The question is: What will you have for lunch?

Inasmuch as Jesus is present in all love and life here on earth, he is also present in all suffering (Linzey, *Animal Theology* 48-52). In “Still Falls the Rain,” Edith Sitwell expresses the ongoing suffering of humanity, the suffering of all life at the hands of humanity, including the suffering of Jesus: “Still falls the rain— / Dark as the world of man, black as our loss— Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails upon the Cross.” Sitwell describes ongoing, human-induced misery, and how God suffers with our indifference and cruelty:

He bears in His Heart all wounds,--those of the light
that died,
The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart, the wounds of the sad
uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear,--
The blind and weeping bear whom the keepers beat
On his helpless flesh . . . the tears of the hunted
hare.

“If God is pre-eminently present in the suffering of the vulnerable, the undefended, the unprotected and the innocent, God’s suffering presence is to be located . . . in the suffering of all the vulnerable, undefended, unprotected and innocent in this world, including animals” (Linzey, *After* 129).

One act of kindness, one way to make “earth as it is in heaven” is to become a vegan. Steve Kaufman, founder of the Christian Vegetarian Association, comments that a vegan diet is neither a burden nor self-sacrifice, but part of a broader spiritual life “manifesting core values such as love, compassion, and peace” (1). Many early Christians expressed their attentiveness to God’s creation by abstaining from eating flesh.

James (Jesus’ brother) was widely recognized as a vegetarian, and ancient sources also describe Matthew and all the apostles as abstaining from

flesh. Many early church leaders practiced vegetarianism, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Arnobius, the Desert Fathers, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Tertullian. Augustine, . . . acknowledged in the fourth century that Christian vegetarians were “without number”. (Kaufman 28)

Christians living in the image of God will not “satisfy a taste preference at the expense of others’ suffering,” but rather, will “reach out and assist those in need” (Kaufman 30). Christians who respect creation will assist God in “reconciling all Creation to a peaceful [vegan] world. Because meat eating contributes to environmental degradation and harms creatures whose spark of life. . . derives from God, every meal in which we abstain from flesh becomes a prayerful expression of love and respect for God” (Kaufman 2).

The human body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” in the Christian spiritual vision (1 Cor. 6:19). A flesh-based diet is linked with leading health problems: heart disease, cancers, and obesity, and numerous other serious health problems. A vegan diet will “help take care of animals, the earth, and our bodies” and also helps to feed those who are poor by feeding grains to people, instead of cattle, pigs, and chickens (Kaufman ix). A vegan diet is not only good for animals, but for all of creation.

A flesh-based diet “wastes about 80-90% percent of grains’ proteins, 90-96% of their calories, 100 percent of their carbohydrate, and 100 percent of their fiber. If Americans reduce their meat consumption by 10 percent, newly available croplands could provide enough food to feed those who die of malnutrition and starvation. While political and social factors significantly impact world hunger, Christians could significantly help reduce world hunger if they chose plant-based diets. More grains would be available for hungry people, and people could donate the money they saved to hunger relief. (Kaufman 18)

For Christians, a vegan diet “expresses core Christian principles such as love, compassion, peace, justice, and mercy.

. . . , helps spare animals from suffering and death, preserve[s] human health, alleviate[s] world hunger, and prevent[s] environmental degradation” (Kaufman 5). For Christians, our God-given duty to serve creation does not permit feeding 70% of the grain crop to cattle, causing soil erosion and the destruction of rainforests for grazing cattle, nor does it allow for the use of chemicals and fossil fuels, pollutants and poisons, or heaps of animal waste—all of which are part and parcel of a flesh-based diet. The Christian duty to serve and lovingly tend creation does not permit Christians to deplete the seas merely for the taste of fish. “A diet that preserves our health and avoids harming others expresses love. . . . [W]hen we consider our desires more important than the well-being of others, we stray from Jesus’ message of mercy, peace, and love” (Kaufman 30-31).

Conclusion

Christians accept the creation story of the Tanakh, which provides a spiritual vision where all of creation is morally important, and where humans are the servants of God, tending creation. For those of the Christian faith, God is the measure of all, not human beings. Exemplary Christians, including saints, reveal that those who are close to God are compassionate toward all creatures. The core of the Christian tradition is love; Christians are called to love all that God has created. The Christian life is not passive, but active. Through a Christ-like life, those of faith are to recreate the peaceful world God intended, in which there will be no exploitation or bloodshed. The Christian spiritual life is modeled on the compassion of Jesus, both man and God, champion of the oppressed, servant to those in need, protector of the abused.

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